



**University of
Zurich^{UZH}**

**Zurich Open Repository and
Archive**

University of Zurich
University Library
Strickhofstrasse 39
CH-8057 Zurich
www.zora.uzh.ch

Year: 1998

Converbs in cross-linguistic perspective [review article of Haspelmath and König, eds., Converbs in cross-linguistic perspective: structure and meaning of adverbial verb forms - adverbial participles, gerunds, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter 1995]

Bickel, Balthasar

Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich
ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-76655>
Journal Article

Originally published at:

Bickel, Balthasar (1998). Converbs in cross-linguistic perspective [review article of Haspelmath and König, eds., Converbs in cross-linguistic perspective: structure and meaning of adverbial verb forms - adverbial participles, gerunds, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter 1995]. *Linguistic Typology*, 2:381-397.

Converbs in cross-linguistic perspective

BALTHASAR BICKEL

Martin Haspelmath & Ekkehard König (eds.), *Converbs in Cross-linguistic Perspective: Structure and Meaning of Adverbial Verb Forms—Adverbial Participles, Gerunds*. (Empirical Approaches to Language Typology, 13.) Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995, x+565 pages, ISBN 3-11-014357-7, DM 298.00.

1. Cross-linguistically valid categories

Typological research presupposes that there are cross-linguistically applicable and valid categories. The volume under review, henceforth referred to as *Converbs*, provides important material for exploring whether or not a particular verb form, viz. the “converb”, is such a category. Unlike, say, “pivot” as used by R. M. W. Dixon or in Role and Reference Grammar, which makes claims about syntactic behaviour only, the notion of “converb” refers to a bundle of syntactic, morphological, and semantic properties of a word form. Such a category is cross-linguistically valid to the degree that we find, again and again all around the globe, forms with sufficiently similar properties on all three levels, i.e., that we find a prototype which bundles properties in a specific way. *Converbs* proposes two different ways of setting up and motivating such a prototype, one by Vladimir P. Nedjalkov, which I will discuss in Section 2, the other by Martin Haspelmath, which is discussed in Section 3. Nedjalkov’s proposal is further specified and made more precise in König’s contribution and is partly redefined in Bisang’s chapter. These further developments are the topic of Section 4. In the remaining sections, I discuss the validity of these proposals on the basis of the language-specific and family-specific contributions that form the major part of the volume. Section 5 is devoted to contributions on European languages (Kortmann, Weiss, de Groot), Section 6 discusses work on the greater “Altaic” area (Johanson, Slobin, Bergelson & Kibrik, I. Nedjalkov), and Section 7 summarizes studies

of other Asian and of Caucasian languages (Häspelmith, Alpatov & Podlesskaya, Tikkanen). In the final section I draw some conclusions about the status of the converb as a typologically useful notion and suggest some lines of future inquiry.

Before proceeding, a short comment on the formal quality of the book is in order. The copy-editing is sometimes a bit disappointing, especially in view of the price of DM 298. Glosses are insufficiently standardized in some chapters, and proof-reading has not achieved the same quality throughout the book. Fortunately, virtually no mistakes are misleading in content (except perhaps on p. 180, line 9, where “aspect” should probably be read for “action”, and on p. 329, line 16, where the reference should be “Imart 1981: 1600” instead of “1981: 600”).

2. Nedjalkov's conception of converbs

Nedjalkov's contribution is the translation of a paper that appeared in 1990 in Russian and that constituted one of the first typological studies of converbs. Nedjalkov proposes a rather loose definition, thereby following the Altaicist tradition from which the term “converb” originally stems. A converb is defined as a dependent verb form that is used neither as an actant nor as an attribute (p. 97). Nedjalkov's converb includes both finite and nonfinite forms and ultimately subsumes, therefore, any adjunct clause that is marked by a verbal affix rather than by a free conjunction.

Locating a core parameter of clause linkage typology in the difference of bound vs. free morphology is traditional and is manifested in long-standing debates about whether or not languages such as Turkish have “real” subordinate clauses. In order to maintain such a parameter one would have to show that the agglutination of clause relators to a finite verb (such as Yup'ik Eskimo *-pailg* ‘before’ or *-llr* ‘when’) implies syntactic behaviour that systematically differs from what is found in its analytic counterparts. It remains an open issue whether this is in fact the case. The validity of the parameter certainly cannot be based, as Nedjalkov suggests (p. 100), on the finding that not every converb in language A can be translated by a conjunction in language B, or that converbal and conjunctive clauses are not always “interchangeable” in a language that features both.

Nedjalkov's broad definition is made more specific by syntactic and semantic subdistinctions. With regard to syntactic function, Nedjalkov (pp. 98–99) distinguishes “converbs proper”, which are embedded as adverbials, “coordinate converbs”, which behave like Papuan *Satzinnenformen* (“medial verb forms”) (p. 114), and “conjunctive converbs”, which are adverbial but have their own subject. The last type is reminiscent of the school grammarians' distinction of *ablativus absolutus* vs.

participium coniunctum and it is doubtful whether the presence vs. absence of an overt subject NP in an adverbial clause is sufficiently important outside Indo-European to warrant its fundamental status in typological theory. Whereas Nedjalkov's syntactic tripartition does not seem to have been widely accepted by the other contributors, his semantic tripartition is taken up in many chapters of the volume. Nedjalkov differentiates "specialized", "contextual", and "narrative" converbs (pp. 106–110). Specialized converbs mark a specific (e.g., conditional or temporal) interpositional relation, while contextual converbs allow for a great variety in interpreting the relation between clauses. While this distinction is descriptively useful, it is probably, as pointed out by Bisang (p. 156), gradual rather than discrete. Narrative converbs, finally, are plot-advancing chaining forms.

In the rest of his contribution, Nedjalkov offers an elaborate catalogue of morphological conflations of converbs with other deverbal forms (participles, gerunds, infinitives) and of further subdistinctions that can be made on the basis of switch reference devices, agreement type, subject expression, and tense distinctions.

Nedjalkov's approach is squarely placed in the Russian typological tradition. Its perspective is more taxonomic than explanatory, and it thus has its major merit in providing a useful overview on the kind of phenomena that must be accounted for in a typological theory.

3. Haspelmath's conception of converbs

While Nedjalkov delineates the "converb" syntactically only against attributive and completive forms, Haspelmath argues for the existence of a narrower cross-linguistic prototype and proposes a definition which bundles specific choices in syntax, morphology, and semantics. Syntactically, a converb is subordinate in the sense of being embedded as an adverbial constituent according to a set of formal properties (pp. 12–17). Morphologically, a converb in Haspelmath's sense is nonfinite (pp. 4–7). This is a major contrast to Nedjalkov's concept and has the advantage that the definition of converb ("nonfinite adverbial verb form") is conceptually parallel (pp. 3–4) to the traditional definition of participles ("nonfinite adjectival verb form") and masdars or verbal nouns ("nonfinite nominal verb form"). On the semantic level, Haspelmath defines converbs as forms that "generally modify verbs, clauses or sentences" (p. 7). All three criteria are of course highly problematic concepts, and Haspelmath takes great care in precisely defining the terms and discussing the boundaries between converb and related forms such as supines (also known as "purposives", "implicated verb forms") and infinitives. There are two major empirical challenges to Haspelmath's proposal.

One challenge comes from the fact that, as Haspelmath acknowledges himself (pp. 5–6), finiteness is inherently a gradual concept. Traditionally, “finite” referred to verb forms that are delimited (*finitum*) with respect to person and number agreement, but with the recent inclusion of various degrees of tense, aspect, and mood specification, the concept now encompasses variable quantities of category specifications.

The other, even more important challenge lies in the notion of “adverbial subordination”, the cross-linguistic validity of which is by no means guaranteed. Some languages make a strong distinction between “ad-sentential” subordination, providing a topic or framework for subsequent discourse, and “ad-verbial” (peripheral) subordination, modifying the situation described by the main verb (Bickel 1991). Many Kiranti (Tibeto-Burman) languages, for instance, use nonfinite forms (converbs and supines) only for the latter, adsentential subordination (and chaining) being expressed by (more) finite clauses (cf. Ebert 1993: 89). Thus, Belhare restricts the use of nonfinite converbs to the clausal periphery, where they are part of the sentential focus domain and therefore integrated into the main clause operator scope (Bickel 1993):¹

- (1) a. *Dhankuta la um-sa khar-a!*
 Dhankuta walk-CONV go-IMPERATIVE
 ‘Go by foot to Dhankuta!’
 b. *Yan his-sa la ŋŋ-um-ʔ-ni.*
 DISTRIBUTIVE watch-CONV walk NEG-walk-NPT(3SG)-NEG
 ‘S/he walks around without looking at things.’
 (not: ‘When looking at things, s/he doesn’t walk.’)

The embedded position of the converb clause in (1a) is further evidenced by the fact that the zero case on *Dhankuta* is licensed by the main verb and not by the converb (cf. **Dhankuta la umhe* vs. *Dhankuta-e la umhe* ‘He walked around in Dhankuta’ with locative *-e*). Belhare converbs, including the supine in *-si*, are not found extraposed into an adsentential topic position as is common with English infinitives (cf., e.g., *To register, you first fill out the form, then ...*; cf. Thompson 1985). The adsentential position is reserved in Belhare for finite forms suffixed by a topic marker as in the following examples.

- (2) a. *Men sidha yunŋa i, ŋke-phok saro*
 kind.of medicine is Q our-stomach very
tuk-naŋa?
 hurt(3SG.NPT)-TOP
 ‘Is there some medicine against stomach-ache?’

- b. *Atoll-e honn-ab-a-ŋ-naŋa to-na*
 Atol-LOC appear-over.here-SUBJ-1SG-TOP up-ART
Paŋpaŋti-ha gari uŋ-yakt-he.
 Paŋpaŋti-GEN car come.down-IPFV-PT(3SG)
 'When I arrived over here in Atol, the upper Paŋpaŋti
 [Company]'s car was just coming down.'

Topic clauses like these generally provide a temporal or modal framework for the main predication (which is actually often much longer than a single clause).

A similar contrast between adsentential and adverbial (verb-modifying) clauses is found in many Papuan languages, where the former involve topic markers and the latter case suffixes attached to finite forms (cf. Foley 1986). Thus, it may be a European particularity to treat "modification" of sentences and clauses in the same way as the modification of verbs and verb phrases (Bickel 1993).

What seems to be more typical of the classical "converb" type in Central Asia and adjacent areas is the systematic conflation of—or at least some overlap between—modifying and chaining functions. This is argued for explicitly by Johanson in his contribution on Turkic (cf. Section 6 below) and also seems to be largely characteristic of the Indo-Aryan conjunctive participles (cf., e.g., Davison 1981; Tikkanen 1987; Bickel 1991: 185–187), of their equivalent in Burushaski (see Tikkanen's chapter) and in Japanese (Kuno 1973, 1978; Ono 1993; Bisang, p. 161). Haspelmath acknowledges this himself (p. 26), but prefers to assume bifunctional converbs in these languages. Yet why should the European conflation type be privileged over the Asian type? From a Kiranti perspective, the Russian *deepričastie* or the English *-ing* form is also clearly bifunctional, and this functional distinction is well-supported by language-internal evidence: intonational phrasing and scope properties differentiate in both languages between adsentential (detached) and adverbial (non-detached) uses (cf., among others, Rappaport 1984 on Russian, König [pp. 87–89] and Kortmann [pp. 198–199] on English).

4. Other cross-linguistic contributions

Ekkehard König's and Walter Bisang's chapters both basically adopt Nedjalkov's subdistinctions but add further qualifications and specifications. König's chapter is focussed on the semantics and pragmatics of converbs, whereas Bisang's paper introduces formal correlates of Nedjalkov's converb types.

König explores Nedjalkov's semantic typology under the assumption of a strict semantics vs. pragmatics distinction, which allows precise

statements about whether a contextual converb is polysemous or vague. A general result of König's research on (mainly) European converbs is that there are more cases of vague than of polysemous markers. The interpropositional relations that are contextually realized are captured by a fine-grained network of notions that includes a cross-linguistically well-motivated decomposition of "condition" into "sequence" and "hypothetical status" (p. 68). One interpropositional relation that might have deserved more attention is purpose and posterior consequence (p. 88). This notion tends to be notoriously absent from European converb interpretations (cf. Rappaport 1984 and Weiss's contribution to *Converbs*, pp. 250–251, on Russian)—a fact that seems to be largely due to the existence of specialized supine forms that pragmatically pre-empt a purposive reading (Russian *čtoby* or German *um zu* plus infinitive, Latin *-tum*, etc.). The second half of König's contribution is devoted to a detailed discussion of how various factors (constituent order, syndesis [conjunctions and other connective devices], aspect and Aktionsart, tense and modality) work together with pragmatic principles and world knowledge in deriving context-specific interpretations of converbal clauses.

Bisang (pp. 154–155) redefines Nedjalkov's terms "coordinative", "narrative", and "conjunctive converb" on the basis of Bickel's (1991) three criteria of (i) morphological symmetry (following Haiman 1985), (ii) binarity of relations, and (iii) main clause operator scope. Coordinative and conjunctive converbs are both constitutive of binary relations, whereas narrative converbs generate linear sequences. Coordinative converbs differ from the other two types by requiring formal symmetry and by referring to parallel events. Conjunctive converbs differ from narrative and coordinative converbs by forming clauses that tend to be outside the scope of main clause (illocutionary) operators. Notice that Bisang's set of notions includes terms that are defined by Nedjalkov as syntactic subtypes ("coordinate", "conjunctive") along with the term "narrative" that is part of Nedjalkov's semantic tripartition. The other two semantic subtypes, "contextual" and "specialized converbs", are subsumed under "conjunctive" in Bisang's framework, which also encompasses Nedjalkov's third syntactic subtype, viz. "converbs proper".

Bisang's contribution also provides a highly needed extension of the discussion to phenomena that are functionally similar to converbs, viz. verb and root serialization. The close relationship between the two phenomena is also emphasized by Slobin who draws attention to similarities between the functional ranges of Turkish *-ErEk* converbs and Chinese serial verb constructions (p. 360). Bisang locates the difference between serial verbs and converbs in the development of a morphological asymmetry between subordinate and independent verb forms. This, he claims,

is blocked and serialization is the only option if the language is isolating or if the morphology is strongly fused to its host. While at first sight there is good evidence for the latter case from Yabêm (176–177), the existence of converbs—along with marginal cases of serialization—in extremely fusional languages such as Russian (see Weiss’s chapter) casts doubt as to the strength of the argument that “there is no chance [in Yabêm] for asymmetry [and thus converbs; BB] to develop” (p. 177).

5. European converbs

Bernd Kortmann’s, Daniel Weiss’s, and Casper de Groot’s chapters are concerned with converbs in three European languages, viz. English, Russian, and Hungarian. In these languages, converbs are used on all levels of “adverbial subordination”, from verb and verb phrase modification to adsentential topic setting and illocutionary force hedging (the latter use as in *frankly speaking*, is called “absolute” by Weiss [p. 252], offering yet another interpretation of this overused term). The use range also includes converbs as subcategorized complements of specific matrix verbs.

A general concern in several chapters on European converbs is a timely rejection of the school grammar myths about coreference constraints (Haspelmath, pp. 29–37; Kortmann, pp. 205–214; Weiss, pp. 258–68). This insight has generated much progress in the analysis of how various complex factors interact in determining referential control and the volume under review adds interesting findings to this body of research. It might be exaggerating the case a bit, however, to conclude from this that languages like Russian develop towards topic-prominence (Weiss, p. 261): Russian still shares the traditional Indo-European horror of nominative subjects combined with nonfinite forms—an unthinkable constraint in a topic-prominent language. Evidently, the *pièce de résistance* of the subject is built by controllees, not by controllers in constructions that involve pivots.

In his chapter on English, Kortmann summarizes his 1991 monograph and offers a detailed discussion of the *-ing* form based on corpus data. Like König, Kortmann pays particular attention to the interpropositional relations realized by converbs and the various syntactic and semantic factors that constrain contextual interpretations. Kortmann argues (pp. 211–214) that the distinction between absolutes and free adjuncts is not based on a [\pm coreferent] feature, since absolutes often involve referential interlacing in terms of part-whole relations (*‘That’s better’ he said, his spirits rising a little*). What is more important for the syntax of English converbs is that they are part of a paradigm including non-verbal heads as well (*Back in her office, Christine looked briefly into her files*).

Another interesting finding of Kortmann's is the hypothesis that for contextual converbs a low degree of referential interlacing implies a narrow interpretive range in interpropositional relations (p. 225). In other words, the more specific the interpropositional relation, the looser the referential relations, and vice-versa. This principle is further instantiated by Bergelson & Kibrik's observation (p. 394) that "quasi-coordinate", i.e., narrative/chaining converbs, which tend to be unspecific as to the interpropositional relation (cause, consequence, condition, etc.), frequently develop markers for referential relations (switch reference). Conversely, adverbial-subordinate converbs, which tend to lack specific constraints about their referential relations, tend to develop markers specifying the interpropositional relation.

Weiss's chapter, which is mostly diachronic in orientation, extends the discussion to adverbially used participles, because participles in part compensate for missing forms of the Russian *deepričastie* (passive, anterior imperfective) and are also at its historical origin. The lack of an anterior imperfective form is particularly interesting and may result, as Weiss suggests, from the tendency of imperfective converbs to be backgrounded and thus to be simultaneous to the main clause situation (p. 245). The Russian converb is uncommon in spontaneous discourse, and if it is used at all, it is most typical in non-detached, verb-modifying (p. 244; cf. example (8a) below) or in illocutionary force hedging (p. 252; cf. example (8c) below) functions (from which there is only a short step to lexicalization and grammaticalization). Apart from this, the spoken language favours serial verb constructions (3a) where the norm prefers converbs (3b) (p. 251):

- (3) a. *Sid-it* *molč-it*.
 sit-3SG.PRES be.silent-3SG.PRES
 b. *Sid-it* *molč-a*.
 sit-3SG.PRES be.silent-CONV
 'S/he sits silently.'

This underlines again the functional similarity between these two constructions as pointed out by Bisang and Slobin in their chapters.

De Groot's chapter is a helpful summary of the various uses of the Hungarian converb, including its uses in periphrastic aspecto-temporal constructions. Like Kortmann, de Groot devotes much attention to a detailed discussion of information-structure properties, but assumes a definition of "topic" that not every reader will follow. Contrary to the evidence discussed by Marchese (1977) and Haiman (1978) and many others since these path-breaking publications, de Groot's definition restricts topics to "entities" (p. 300) and thus makes it impossible to analyze

adsentential converb clauses as describing the topic for a subsequent stretch of discourse (p. 299).

6. Altaic converbs

The notion “converb” was first coined for languages of the Altaic region, in a study on Mongolian by Gustaf John Ramstedt in 1903. Against this background, it is surprising that these languages are not better represented in the volume under review. This is excused, however, by the fact that the research for the volume was partly financed by the European Science Foundation’s program “Typology of Languages of Europe” (p. v). At any rate, *Converbs* includes a chapter on Northern Tungusic (Evenki) by Igor’ Nedjalkov and detailed discussions of Turkic languages by Lars Johanson, Dan Slobin, and Mira Bergelson & Andrej Kibrik. The Altaic facts are particularly important in the light of Johanson’s claim that converbs typically include both adverbial-modifying and chaining-nonmodifying functions—a claim that is at odds with Haspelmath’s definition as much as with the frequently cited Role and Reference Grammar distinction between “subordination” and “cosubordination” (Foley & Van Valin 1984; Van Valin & LaPolla 1997). One can only hope that *Converbs* stimulates more research in this area.

The core feature of Johanson’s theory of converbs (since the mid-70s; cf., e.g., Johanson 1975, 1992) is that the difference between modifying and non-modifying uses is located in semantics rather than syntax. On the syntactic level, converbs are simply “subordinate” in the sense of being “dependent”. Johanson thus rejects syntactic notions like “cosubordination” which postulate syntactic properties exclusively associated with what he calls “nonmodifying subordination” (pp. 322–327). These properties, especially operator scope and focusability, are semantic properties for Johanson, whereas in Role and Reference Grammar they are formal correlates of “dependency”, i.e., of linkage properties that are defined on a par with such notions as “embedding”. Decisive between these two approaches is the question of whether operator scope and focusability are linked to a grammaticalized, formal feature (e.g., a limited paradigm of grammemes, a position, a dependency relation) that cannot be reduced to the semantic notion “modification” (which is general and not limited to clause linkage). Johanson’s theory predicts that such a reduction can always be made, and since his theory is more parsimonious, it is up to alternative theories to demonstrate cases which call for irreducibly SYNTACTIC properties.

In his contribution, Johanson limits himself to interpretational and translational evidence from various languages showing that converbs

allow both modifying and non-modifying functions. It would have been helpful to have more detailed discussion of the relation between “modification” and operator scope and focusability. The only unambiguous example of a Turkish *-Ip* clause in modifying function (p. 333) is inconclusive as to operator scope because the interrogative marker *mu* is adjacent to the subordinate clause itself:

- (4) *Otur-up mu konuş-tu-lar?*
 sit-CONV Q speak-PT-PL
 ‘Did they speak sitting?’

Slobin’s contribution stands out, together with Tikkanen’s chapter, in systematically looking at discourse functions of converbs. The focus is on the converb in *-ErEk*, which was introduced into Turkish relatively recently and, although common in adult speech, is learned rather late by children, viz. at about age 7 (pp. 350–351). Much earlier, the converbs in *-IncE* and *-Erken* are mastered, immediately followed by *-Ip*. Slobin proposes that this developmental pattern can be explained by the degree of functional and semantic complexity of the various forms. *-IncE* and *-Erken* support narrower ranges of inferences about interpropositional relations and have a relatively straightforward sequence (*-IncE*) vs. simultaneity (*-Erken*) semantics. Both are used for background AND plot-advancing uses (p. 354), in line with Johanson’s suggestion that Turkic converbs do not formally distinguish between these two functions. The semantics of *-Ip*, a plot-advancing narrative converb, is also rather straightforward, but the difference between *-Ip* and *-ErEk* presupposes an advanced understanding of narrative structure that children acquire only at about age 5 cross-linguistically (p. 364): while *-Ip* emphasizes the separateness of events, creating a kind of *staccato* narration, *-ErEk* integrates situations into a single complex event (p. 357). This contrast of information packaging brings a new perspective to the study of converbs. The core functions of converb categories may turn out not to be in specifying various types of clause linkage (subordination, cosubordination, etc.), but rather in articulating information units in discourse (paragraph, sentence, clause)—along the lines proposed by Longacre (1972) for medial verb chains in languages of the Papuan Highlands.

Bergelson & Kibrik focus on switch reference phenomena in Tuva, contradicting Johanson’s claim (p. 319) that in Turkic languages “there are no consistent comparative personal reference tracking” systems (translating Bickel’s 1991 cover term *vergleichende Referenzfährtel/Personalfährte* for switch reference, logophorics, etc.). Bergelson & Kibrik’s hypothesis is problematic and difficult to assess for the non-specialist since they do not discuss Johanson’s counterexample (quoted from earlier work by

Ljudmila Šamina) showing the alleged different-subject form *-r ... -GA* with subject coreference. Bergelson & Kibrik's article was first published in Russian in 1987, but the inclusion of this work into the volume would certainly have provided an opportunity to discuss the evidence in more detail. Johanson's counteranalysis proposes that *-r ... -GA* is a "hiatus form marking a looser connection of the events than [the same-subject form, BB] *-γaš*" (p. 331). Thus, as suggested by Slobin's contribution, propositional information packaging in discourse may be the key to understanding converb categories in this language as well. Notice that switch reference is known in Papuan linguistics to be intimately linked to discourse articulation (cf., e.g., Longacre 1972; Scott 1973).

Moreover, as Bergelson & Kibrik (pp. 390–391) show, the *-r ... -GA* form is derived from a case-marked masdar. It is thus reminiscent of an absolute case construction which offers yet another line of analysis. The core feature of absolute cases is their ability to link propositional rather than referential expressions. A bias towards disjoint subject reference is common but it is not completely grammaticalized in languages like Latin, Ancient Greek, or English (cf. Section 5 above). Further grammaticalization of absolute case constructions can end up in different-subject marking (as they did in some Yuman and Muskogean languages; Bickel 1991: 175–176), but this need not be so (Bickel, in preparation, on Kiranti) and Tuva might be another counterexample.

Bergelson & Kibrik's contribution also includes a careful discussion of the precise conditions that allow the use of the "same-subject" form. Interestingly, genitive-marked possessors are treated as (metonymically) "the same" as their possessee but dative-marked experiencers do not count as "the same" as a coreferential agent (pp. 381–385). Compared to this, same-subject marking in the Tungusic language Evenki tolerates even more deviations from strict coreference. As shown by Igor' Nedjalkov, same-subject converbs can be used even when the actual referential overlap is merely inferred, for instance by the actual presence of the converbal clause referent in the situation denoted by the following clause, e.g. (p. 459):

- (5) *Tar ηene-kse-l, ηene-kse-l d'egde bi-d'ere-n.*
 that go-CONV(SS)-PL go-CONV(SS)-PL fire be-PRES-3SG
 'So they went and went (and saw) there was a fire.'

The switch reference system is established by reflexive possessive desinences, similar to the Eskimo pattern. It remains to be seen whether these desinences attest to a nominal quality of converbs and whether they would not be better analyzed as masdars in adverbial function.

A noteworthy feature of Evenki converbs is the frequent postpositioning of the converb after the main clause. This is clearly different from the mainstream Turkic pattern and more in line with Eskimo languages. Another difference from Turkic is a marginal use in complementation to modal and phasal verbs (p. 457), making the Evenki converbs bifunctional in Nedjalkov's sense. One wonders how general these differences between the Turkic and the Tungusic examples are and whether the "Altaic" converb is areally homogenous or whether the circumpolar area might not turn out to be more important in shaping converbs.

7. Other Asian languages and Lezgian

The other languages dealt with in *Converbs*, viz. Lezgian, Japanese, and Burushaski, are in line with the Turkic type insofar as they include both adverbial/modifying and chaining/nonmodifying functions.

Haspelmath's second contribution to *Converbs* is devoted to the Nakh-Daghestanian language Lezgian. The forms seem to follow the Turkic pattern in supporting both adverbial and chaining functions, but the latter use tends to be limited to two-event sequences (p. 423). More in line with the standard European style, Lezgian converbs are also used as subcategorized complements and are thus bifunctional in Nedjalkov's sense. In contrast to European languages, there are no constraints on controllers or controllees.

As in his other contribution (see Section 3 above), Haspelmath pays particular attention to the grammaticalization of converbs into postpositions, e.g., *gala-z* 'being behind/with' > 'with' (p. 436). This development is probably best understood in the light of the tendency in many languages to adjoin circumstantial information by clausal rather than nominal means and to keep the noun:verb ratio more even than what we are used to in Standard Average European.

Vladimir Alpatov & Vera Podlesskaya argue that Japanese converbs are used both subordinatively and coordinatively, where "coordination" implies conceptual "symmetry" in the sense of Haiman (1985) and is instantiated by converbs in *-tari* (pp. 471, 477–478). Among the other Japanese converbs, *-i* is said to be "more coordinative" than *-te* (p. 474), but it is difficult to see how this characterization gets us further than Myhill & Hibiya's (1988) detailed discourse study of these forms. Moreover, the gradual conception is obviously in conflict with the discrete syntactic differences they quote from Kuno's (1978: 121–124) and Tamori's (1976) work (pp. 472–473). What makes Japanese converbs difficult to analyze is that they can be used with both coordinative and subordinative syntax and semantics (Kuno 1973: 195–209). Yet, showing this

is different from demonstrating that the properties differentiating coordination and subordination (operator scope, extraction tolerance, cataphor resolution, question formation, etc.) define a continuum, either in Japanese or in general. Further discussion and extensive illustration of this problem is found in an article by Ono (1993), which appeared too late to be included in the bibliography included at the end of *Converbs*. Alpatov & Podlesskaya conclude their contribution with a cursory discussion of various conditional and concessive converbs (pp. 478–482).

The last chapter of *Converbs* is Bertil Tikkanen's excellent study of Burushaski, which is very careful in analyzing operator scope and focusability of converbs ("conjunctive participles") in different uses. The Burushaski converb follows the Turkic pattern and has no strict coreference requirement although there is a clear bias towards subject identity. As suggested by Tikkanen (p. 496), this property is in line with other South Asian converbs. Tikkanen postulates two main uses of converbs, distinguished by operator scope and focusability. One use, corresponding largely to Johanson's modifying function, is "propositionally restrictive". This use tolerates focusing of the converbal clause (or the interpropositional relation) and entails a disjunct operator scope where either the converbal or the main clause falls under the scope of main clause operators—but not both at the same time. The other use is non-restrictive (non-modifying). This use is therefore incompatible with restrictive focusing and requires conjunctive operator scope, with both clauses integrated into a single overall scope (p. 504). Burushaski converbs are used with both interpretations (pp. 509–515). Tikkanen does not specify whether the distinction involves irreducible syntactic features or whether it ultimately dissolves, following Johanson, into purely semantic or discourse-pragmatic notions.

What is curious about Burushaski is that although the (restrictive) converb clause can be the focus of the sentence (6), it cannot be overtly marked by focus particles (pp. 514–515).

- (6) —*Béšal ún(-e) čái mi-í bá-a?*
 when 2SG(-ERG) tea drink-DUR AUX-1/2SG
 'When do you drink your tea?'
 —*Je bayú nétanin mi-í-ya-m.*
 I rock.salt do.CONV drink-DUR-1SG-PTCPL
 'I drink it, after putting rock salt into it.'

This is different from converbs in Indo-Aryan languages which in other respects behave quite similarly to Burushaski: a Nepali sentence like (7) is perfectly well-formed.

- (7) *Timī-le bhan-era mātrai yo kām gar-ẽ*
 you-ERG say-CONV only this work do-1SG.PT
 ‘It did this only because you told me so.’

Similar instances from Hindi are reported by Davison (1981: 111–112).

8. Conclusions and prospects

In conclusion, *Converbs* is an extremely useful and highly welcome collection of the issues and data relevant for any discussion of the converb as a cross-linguistically viable notion. It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that *Converbs* belongs to those books that tend always to be checked out of libraries. There are also many useful cross-references, elaborate indices and a comprehensive bibliography compiled by Haspelmath (pp. 529–547). Haspelmath also provides a very helpful terminological survey (pp. 45–46), but he is a bit overstating the case when claiming that “South Asian converbs are not diachronically related to participles” (p. 46). This is not true for Nepali which has a converb *-era* derived from a now virtually defunct participle in *-e* (< *-yā*) with an affixed conjunction *ra* ‘and’ (Grierson 1916: 36).

But the more important question is this: Is the converb a cross-linguistically viable notion? The evidence provided by *Converbs* suggests that there are at least two types of “converbs” and I am not convinced that they can and should be subsumed under the same cover term. One type, which we might label “European”, basically follows Haspelmath’s definition and is generally confined to adverbial (verb-modifying) (8a) and adsentential (8b) subordination, with extensions to illocutionary force hedging (8c) and complement (8d) functions (Russian examples):

- (8) a. *On vyše-l posvistyvaj-a.*
 he go.out.PFV-PT whistle.IPFV-CONV
 ‘He went out whistling.’
 b. *Slušaj-a ego, ja čuvstvova-l sebja očen’ ploxo.*
 listen.IPFV-CONV him I feel.IPFV-PT REFL very bad
 ‘When listening to him, I felt very bad.’
 c. *Otkrovenno govor’-a, èto sovsem nevozmožno.*
 frankly speak.IPFV-CONV that at.all impossible
 ‘Frankly speaking, this is absolutely impossible.’
 d. *My prove-l-i prazdniki kupaj-a-s’ v more.*
 we PFV.spend-PT-PL holidays bathe-CONV-REFL in sea
 (vs. **My proveli Ø.*)
 ‘We spent the holidays bathing in the sea.’

This type does not include chaining functions but rather stands in a binary relation to the main verb (cf. König, p. 72). In line with this, the European converb supports only what Tikkanen calls disjunctive scope integration. Outside Europe, the Tungusic and Eskimo converbs seem to be similar to this type and many Kiranti languages feature a reduced version that supports only adverbial (verb-modifying) but not adsentential subordination.

The other major type of converb could be labelled “Asian” if we allow for regional “holes”. This type is best illustrated by Johanson’s and Tikkanen’s chapters and systematically conflates adverbial modification (9a) and narrative chaining (9b) in a single (set of) dependent verb form(s) (Nepali examples):

- (9) a. *Hid-era āun-chu.*
 walk-CONV come-1SG.NPT
 ‘I will come by foot.’
 b. *Ek chin u saṅga kurā gar-era āun-chu.*
 One moment he with talk do-CONV come-1SG.NPT
 ‘I will talk to him for a moment and then I will come.’

The systematic inclusion of modifying functions makes the Asian converb different from the Papuan *Satzinnenform* and may explain why Central and South Asian sequences only occasionally reach the length of the famous Fore chains or of Swahili *ka*-paragraphs.

Under this view, finiteness is not a crucial parameter in either converb type, following Nedjalkov. Indeed, what seems to be more important from an areal point of view is the particular pattern of linkage type confluations (as suggested in Bickel 1991). It is of course possible to subsume these conflation patterns under a general term “converb”—possibly qualified by *sensu latiore* (‘in a broader sense’), as recently proposed by van der Auwera (1998)—but this would not seem to give us much information about individual languages. When reading that a language has converbs in this broader sense, the only information we would gain is that in this language at least some interpropositional relations are marked by verbal affixes rather than free morphemes (conjunctions). But, as argued in Section 2, it is yet to be demonstrated that this distinction has any syntactic or semantic correlates that would define a cross-linguistically prototypical feature bundle. The distinction certainly does not correlate with the use and distribution of converbs in various clause linkage types.

The major challenges that I see from the current state of the art are twofold. First, detailed research is needed in order to better understand how operator scope and focusability interact with the syntax and semantics of clause linkage, including cataphora resolution and extraction

constraints. Conjunctive scope integration is certainly not just an extension of narrative converbs contingent on SOV word order as suggested by König (p. 91): Swahili converbs in *ka-*, for instance, demonstrate conjunctive scope integration in an SVO language (Bickel 1991: 183–184).

A second challenge comes from discourse. In order to fully understand any kind of converb, there is no way around extensive discourse studies that explore the functions of converbs as textual articulators. Scope properties, for instance, may well turn out not to have to do with either interpropositional semantics or clause linkage syntax but with discourse articulation. This is clearly the case, for instance, with the Turkish example (10), where the negation scope is blocked by the particle *de* (Johanson, p. 338) that articulates the situation into two clearly distinct events.

- (10) *Ev-e gel-ip de el-ler-i-ni yıka-ma-dı.*
house-DAT go-CONV and hand-PL-3POSS-ACC wash-NEG-PT
‘He came home and did not wash his hands.’

While aspects of discourse articulation have been a long-standing concern in work on clause chaining (cf., e.g., Bearth 1969, 1986; Longacre 1972, 1990; Scott 1973), they have unfortunately not (yet) entered mainstream research on converbs.

Received: 27 March 1998

*Universität Zürich
University of California at Berkeley*

Notes

I am much indebted to Johanna Nichols, John Peterson, and Fernando Zúniga for helpful comments on an earlier version, but I am of course alone responsible for all remaining mistakes and misconceptions.

Correspondence address: Department of Slavic Languages, 6303 Dwinelle Hall, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, CA 94720-2979, USA, e-mail: bbickel@spw.unizh.ch; web site: www.unizh.ch/spw/bbickel.html

1. Abbreviations: ACC accusative, ART article, AUX auxiliary, CONV converb, DUR durative, ERG ergative, GEN genitive, IPFV imperfective, LOC locative, NEG negative, NPT non-past, PFV perfective, PL plural, POSS possessive, PRES present, PT past, PTCPL participle, Q interrogative, REFL reflexive, SG singular, SS same subject, SUBJ subjunctive, and TOP topic.

References

- Bearth, Thomas (1969). Phrase et discours en Toura. *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 25: 29–45.
— (1986). *L'Articulation du temps et de l'aspect dans le discours Toura*. Bern: Lang.
Bickel, Balthasar (1991). *Typologische Grundlagen der Satzverkettung: Ein Beitrag zur Allgemeinen Grammatik der Satzverbindung und des Fährtenlegens*. Zürich: ASAS-Verlag.

- (1993). Belhare subordination and the theory of topic. In Ebert (ed.) 1993, 23–55.
- (in preparation). From *ergativus absolutus* to topic marking in the Kirant.
- Davison, Alice (1981). Syntactic and semantic ambiguity resolved: A mostly pragmatic analysis for the Hindi conjunctive participle. In Peter Cole (ed.), *Radical Pragmatics*, 101–127. New York: Academic Press.
- Ebert, Karen H. (1993). Kiranti subordination in the South Asian areal context. In Ebert (ed.) 1993, 83–110.
- Ebert, Karen H. (ed.) (1993). *Studies in Clause Linkage*. Zürich: ASAS-Verlag.
- Foley, William A. (1986). *The Papuan Languages of New Guinea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foley, William A. & Robert D. Van Valin, Jr. (1984). *Functional Syntax and Universal Grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grierson, George A. (1916). *Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. 9, Part 4*. Reprint Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968.
- Haiman, John (1978). Conditionals are topics. *Language* 54: 564–589.
- (1985). Symmetry. In John Haiman (ed.), *Iconicity in Syntax*, 73–95. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Imart, Guy (1981). *Le kirghiz*. Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence.
- Johanson, Lars (1975). Some remarks on Turkic “hypotaxis”. *Ural-Altaische Jahrbücher* 47: 104–118.
- (1992). Periodische Kettensätze im Türkischen. *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 82: 201–211.
- Kortmann, Bernd (1991). *Free Adjuncts and Absolutes in English*. London: Routledge.
- Kuno, Susumu (1973). *The Structure of the Japanese Language*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- (1978). Japanese: A characteristic OV language. In Winfred P. Lehmann (ed.), *Syntactic Typology*, 57–138. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Longacre, Robert E. (1972). *Hierarchy and Universality of Discourse Constituents in New Guinea Languages: Discussion*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- (1990). *Storyline Concerns and Word Order Typology*. Los Angeles: University of California.
- Marchese, Lynell (1977). Subordinate clauses as topics in Godié. In Martin Mould & Thomas J. Hinnebusch (eds.), *Papers from the 8th Conference on African Linguistics*, 157–164. Los Angeles: University of California.
- Myhill, John & Junko Hibiya (1988). The discourse function of clause chaining. In John Haiman & Sandra A. Thompson (eds.), *Clause Combining in Grammar and Discourse*, 361–398. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Ono, Yoshiko (1993). Does Japanese have coordination? In Ebert (ed.) 1993, 131–159.
- Rappaport, Gilbert C. (1984). *Grammatical Function and Syntactic Structure: The Adverbial Participle of Russian*. Columbus, Ohio: Slavica.
- Scott, Graham (1973). *Higher Levels of Fore Grammar*. (Pacific Linguistics, B-23.) Canberra: Australian National University.
- Tamori, Ikuhiro (1976). The semantics and syntax of the Japanese gerundive and infinitive conjunctions. *Papers in Japanese Linguistics* 5: 307–360.
- Thompson, Sandra A. (1985). Grammar and written discourse: Initial vs. final purpose clauses in English. *Text* 5: 55–84.
- Tikkanen, Bertil (1987). *The Sanskrit Gerund: A Synchronic, Diachronic, and Typological Analysis*. Helsinki: The Finnish Oriental Society.
- Van der Auwera, Johan (1998). Defining converbs. In Leonid Kulikov & Heinz Vater (eds.), *Typology of Verbal Categories*, 273–282. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Van Valin, Robert D., Jr. & Randy J. LaPolla (1997). *Syntax: Structure, Meaning, and Function*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

